

## **KING AND MESSIAH AS SON OF GOD: A REVIEW**

Collins, Adela Yarbro, and John J. Collins. *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, xiv + 261 pages.

Originating from the Speaker's Lectures, delivered at Oxford in May 2006, the present work is comprised of a total of eight chapters, four by John J. Collins and four by Adela Yarbro Collins, each of which are designed to mine the crevices of antiquity for conceptions of the king and/or messiah as a divine figure. John J. Collins, Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale Divinity School, is one of the most eminent scholars in the field of Old Testament apocalyptic and messianic expectation in early Judaism. Adela Yarbro Collins, Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale Divinity School, is broadly published in the field of early Christian apocalyptic, with special reference to messianic conception, focusing especially on the book of Revelation and the Gospel of Mark.

After an introductory chapter orienting the reader to the recent discussions of the divinity of the messiah and surveying the individual chapters of the present work, *King and Messiah as Son of God* proceeds to trace the concept of "Son of God" as King from ancient Mesopotamia to the book of Revelation.

### **Chapter 1 - *The King as Son of God* by John J. Collins**

In this chapter, John Collins sets out to answer the question, in what sense were

ancient kings considered to be divine? He begins by tracing the concept of kingship and the epithet, “Son of God,” through ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, and Judah. Having traced the concept to the region of Ancient Judah, a discussion of relevant texts is undertaken, focusing primarily on royal enthronement psalms (Psalm 2 and 110). Set within their original context, John Collins argues that these psalms present the king’s relationship to God as one of unique sonship that is more intimate than adoption, but not as explicit as the literal begetting (via sexual intercourse) found in Egypt. Collins concludes, “The main implication of the declaration that the king was son of God is the implication that he is empowered to act as God’s surrogate on earth” (22). Further, these texts are said to “attribute to the king a love for justice and righteousness that is closely associated with kingship in the Canaanite tradition” (23). Yet, he is careful to stress, “that there is no evidence that the king in ancient Judah as an object of cult or veneration” (23). Lastly, he notes, “Granted that the king is not divine in the same sense as the Most High, the claim that he is ‘begotten’ by God is a statement about a nature and status conferred on him, not just a tutorial relationship” (24).

## **Chapter 2 - *The Kingship in Deuteronomistic and Prophetic Literature* by John J. Collins**

The second chapter provides a discussion of texts from Deuteronomistic literature, as well as prophetic texts. The discussion begins with 2 Samuel 7. He finds the present form of this text to be “no earlier than the time of Josiah, and possibly postexilic” (26), but notes that many scholars “believe that the Deuteronomist was working with an older tradition about the promise

to David” (27). Finally, he concludes that there is “good reason to believe that the Deuteronomic writer was working with older traditions” (27).

Moving beyond issues of provenance and source criticism, Collins undertakes an analysis of the mode of sonship present in 2 Sam 7, which promises “I shall be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me” (אני אהיה לו לאב והוא יהיה לי לבן). Collins notes that this covenantal promise is portrayed as unconditional. However, as he points out, in 1 Kings 8, that promise is presented as conditional (v. 25), just like the Mosaic covenant.

Next, Collins turns to the Davidic covenant in the Psalms, particularly Psalms 89 and 132. The former, Collins notes, displays an understanding of the Davidic covenant that roughly corresponds to that of 2 Sam 7, rather than 1 Kings 8, in that the promise itself stands in perpetuity, despite the certainty that some kings will disobey the covenant. The latter, however, reflects a position closer to that of 1 Kings 8.

Having dealt at length with kingship in the Deuteronomic tradition, Collins sets his attention to the same topic in the prophetic corpus. Discussing pertinent texts, primarily from Isaiah (e.g. Isa 8:23 – 9:6, HT), Collins appropriates his findings to the topics of growing messianic expectation, as well as messianism proper, which he defines as “the hope for restoration of the kingship” (43). This chapter then moves onto a brief discussion of the material that from the prophetic corpus that may present the king as divine.

This chapter concludes that, “in the heyday of the monarchy the king in Jerusalem

was conceived in mythological terms as the son of God in a way that was influenced by Egyptian tradition but less emphatic in its presentation” (47). This tradition was subsequently altered by the “Deuteronomistic theologians” in the late 7th century BCE, as evidenced by Deut 17; 2 Sam 7; and Psalm 89 (all of which present the king as subject to the law and its penalties for disobedience). These texts, which were typically seen as unconditional, were later modified to make the promise conditional in the exilic and early restoration periods (e.g. 1 Kings 8; Psalm 132). The “messianic predictions” that we find in the prophetic books are rather modest in their hopes for the future king. These hopes are not for a divine king until the Hellenistic period (47).

### **Chapter 3 - *Messiah and Son of God in the Hellenistic Period* by John J. Collins**

This chapter offers a survey of, as its title suggests, the epithets “messiah” and “Son of God” in the Hellenistic period. Here Collins gives a treatment of Hellenistic ruler cults, including the infamous story of Alexander the Great, in which Alexander visits of the God Ammon in the Libyan desert at Siwah, after which he emerged as the son of Zeus, the Son of God. After his death, Alexander became the object of cultic worship.

Antiochus Epiphanes, who claimed divine descent, also makes an appearance here, as do the Seleucids. Collins then turns his discussion to the impact that the the divinity of these figure likely had on early Judaism. For these “faithful monotheists.” While some scholars reject any confluence of these two cultures, Collins points to Philo’s praise for Augustus (*Legatio ad Gaium* 143-50) as evidence of the impact of Hellenism on early Jewish treatment of their leaders.

Following on the treatment of the influence of Hellenistic ruler cults, Collins turns his attention to messianism in the LXX, focusing primarily on the Psalms Isaiah, especially Isa 7:14, which moves from **הנה העלמה הרה וילדת בן וקראת שמו עמנו אל** to ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Εμμανουηλ, dealing specifically with the shift from **העלמה** to ἡ παρθένος (59). Collins concludes his discussion, “Nothing in the LXX of Isaiah requires that Immanuel be identified as the messiah” (61). Following this assertion, he offers a brief defense in which he surfaces the various difficulties inherent in concluding otherwise.

After his discussion in the LXX, Collins turns his attention to messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). In his discussion of the DSS, Collins focuses primarily on the “Son of God” text (4Q246), offering an extended discussion of the ins and outs of this problematic passage. He concludes this chapter noting that “the depiction of the ‘son of God’ in 4Q246 fits nicely with the portrayal of the Davidic/royal messiah in the scrolls. He functions as a warrior to subdue the Gentiles: God will make war on his behalf and cast peoples down before him. ‘Son of God’ is an honorific title here” (73). Lastly, he points out that there is a tendency in the LXX (at least in a few places) to attribute to the messiah “preexistence and angelic status” (74).

#### **Chapter 4 - *Messiah and Son of Man* by John J. Collins**

This is the last chapter from John Collins in the present work, and it serves as

somewhat of a climax of his section, dealing specifically with the epithet, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, literally, “the son of man” (בן אדם in Hebrew or בר אנש in Aramaic). After dealing with the well-worn issues in translating this semitism as either a general reference or an epithet Collins dives into a treatment of several important Jewish (Dan 7, 11QMelchizedek [11Q13], the Similitudes of Enoch [*1 Enoch* 37–71], *4 Ezra* 13). Most attention is, rightly in my opinion, spent on the *Similitudes* since they have as a central figure one who is called the Son of Man. This figure, according to *1 En* 46 and 48, is preexistent, bears the divine name, judges the wicked and vindicates the righteous; he also accepts *proskynesis* alongside the “Lord of Spirits” and even sits on God’s throne. Even to the untrained eye, this figure bears a striking resemblance to the presentation of Jesus of Nazareth in the NT, especially in the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the Fourth Gospel. Interesting, *1 En* 71 presents the Son of Man not as Jesus, but as none other than Enoch himself. Collins then offers a brief discussion of the similarities and differences between the *Similitudes*, which he dates pre-70 CE, and *4 Ezra*, which post-dates the destruction of Jerusalem. He concludes that the *Similitudes* and the *4 Ezra* represent different strands of tradition and that there is no reason to posit literary influence between them. Thus, they represent independent attestation to similar, though not synonymous, “assumptions about the meaning of Daniel 7 in first-century Judaism. Very similar assumptions underlie the use of Son of Man imagery derived from Daniel in the Gospels” (98).

He concludes this his final chapter with the following:

In the context of first-century-CE Judaism, it is not surprising or anomalous that divine status should be attributed to someone who was believed by his followers to be the messiah. At the same time, it should be noted that neither the king in ancient Judah nor the messiah in most instances was the object of worship. There is, however, an important exception in the case of the Son of Man in the *Similitudes of Enoch*, before whom all who dwell on the earth are said to perform *proskynesis* by falling down and “worshipping” before him (*1 Enoch* 48:5), but this is distinguished from the honors paid to the Lord of Spirits. Whether *proskynesis* should be deemed to constitute “worship” is a matter of definition, on which there were different opinions already in antiquity. At the least, it acknowledges the superior status and power of the figure who is honored, in this case the Messiah, Son of Man (100).

### Concluding Comments

One is hard-pressed to find a more concise and engaging presentation of the issues surrounding the understanding of the king as divine in antiquity, particularly in Jewish antiquity. One gets the impression that not even one word was wasted in his presentation and argumentation. Perhaps the two most-provocative issues that surface in this first section of *King and Messiah as Son of God* is (1) lack of clear and pronounced messianic expectation in the OT, and (2) the potential impact that the Hellenistic ruler cults had on the divinity of the king in early Judaism. Perhaps more conservative readers will find themselves unsettled at the complexity of issues surrounding the divinity of the the Son of God. Others will receive Collins’ argument with joy at its clarity and acumen.

In what follows I will offer a summary of Chapters 5-8, composed by Adela Yarbro Collins. This review will then conclude with a brief discussion of what I believe are the strengths of the present work, as well as places where I feel there is room for improvement.